Analysis of Rivers State University Students' Perception of Big Brother Naija Reality Television Programme

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ABSTRACT

This study examined Rivers State University students' perception of the Big Brother Naija reality television programme. The study was anchored on the cultivation theory and the uses and gratifications theory. The study gathered quantitative data from respondents using the survey design. The population of the study was the number of undergraduate students, which amounted to 26,834. The sample size was drawn from the population using the Raosoft online sample size calculator table, which was approximately 400 respondents. The study used the convenience sampling technique to reach respondents. The instrument that was used for gathering data for the study was the questionnaire. Data that were collected in the research were statistically analyzed using simple percentages, frequency distributions, Weighted Mean Scores . The data were presented in tables. Findings revealed that the students of Rivers State University do watch the Big Brother Naija reality programme and that their perception towards the programme and how it affects them is individualistic. Findings also revealed that the respondents find the show morally questionable even though they find it entertaining. The study concluded that because Big Brother Naija is unscripted and unedited, it does depict reality to a very large extent and that majority of its audience is made up of the younger minds who watch the programme for various reasons including fashion, latest trends, conflicts and entertainment. Based on the foregoing, this study recommends that the broadcast regulatory bodies and producers of the Big Brother Naija reality programme should look deeper into the Big Brother Naija and strike a balance between freedom of expression and obscenity.

Keywords: Big Brother Naija, audience, perception, morality, programmes

INTRODUCTION

Reality television programmes showed up on our television screens in the 21st century and immediately gained and sustained the viewing audiences. In Nigeria, it is common today to watch one reality programme or another in television stations airing either locally or through terrestrial broadcasting institution that aim at portraying live unscripted and unedited motion pictures have gained undisputed popularity. The rate at which individuals discuss the content of reality shows makes it glaring that this type of television programmes is here to stay. Reality television shows are overtaking the networks leaving behind an even bigger effect than that of regular television.

Reality TV as a genre of television programming that has grown over the years and has become an addiction of some sort for many of their viewers especially youth and female segment of the society. According to Hall (2009:515), reality programmes are now a staple of television programming. Many people watch reality shows for several reasons. Reiss and Wiltz (2004) discovered that an element of reality programmes appeal is that they 'help viewers to feel important because seeing ordinary people on the programme allows them to "fantasize that they could gain celebrity status by being on television.' (Hall, 2009:517).

As viewership increased, producers have also improved on contents and come up with better packages that attracts more audiences to stay glued to their TV screens, thereby, also attracting more sponsorship from organizations.

In Nigeria, reality television programme has in recent time significantly proved to be a favorite among the youth – particularly those who fall within the range of ages 18-25. Advertisers and indigenous sponsors are convinced that endorsement of these reality shows is good business because of the massive viewership that these programmes realize.

The first reality programme in the world emerged nearly the same time as television broadcasting in the 1940s (Balkin, 2004). In Nigeria, the debut of reality television according to This Day newspaper (2004) was launched in 2004 when the Guilder Ultimate Search aired its first episode. Reality television has been an additive to viewers such that it is almost impossible to believe because these programmes are perceived to be just another entertaining television shows.

There are different genres of reality television that include romance, talent, quiz and games. (Bailey & Barbato, 2003). Hall (2006) provides a comprehensive list of reality television categories which include: "competition focused programme, game programme, makeover/lifestyle programs, talent programme, court programs, reality sitcoms, home improvement programme, and hidden camera-based shows" (p. 204). Regardless of the kind to reality show, there exist an eventual bond among the audiences, between the participants and the audiences and a relationship between participants that is formed overtime out of a prolonged stay in a given, controlled environment. The Big Brother Naija (BBN) is a Nigerian television programme that features Nigerians as participants of the programme. BBN is a reality television show that sprung out of a broader reality television programme – Big Brother Africa (BBA). Daniel (2016) describes the ideology of Big Brother as a concept that originated from George Orwell's novel "Nineteen Eighty-Four". The book is about a fictitious *Big Brother* who had surveillance cameras scattered all over the county to garner hidden facts and truths about residents of the vicinity.

In 2017 a Nigerian, Kevin Chuwang Pam won the BBA (Arah. 2017) with a $200,000 cash prize and this occurrence contributed in the resuscitation of BBN. BBN is a reality television programme that is viewed mostly by the youths in the society because the participants of the show fall within the age bracket of the audiences. The programme originally debut in 2006 but did not organize subsequent editions until 2017. Each year, hundreds of young people dream about being a participant in the house because of the fame and attractive prizes that winners get to go home with. Once in the house audiences including university students spend weeks following the television broadcasts of the occurrences and progress of the 'house' events that include games, tasks, conflicts, parties, discussion sessions, romance and eviction series.

Big Brother Naija has been said to impact negatively on the viewing audience because of certain inappropriate scenes that are permitted and encouraged in the house. This is particularly worrisome because the demographics of the audience that are attached to this programmes are the younger ones. Parents, teachers, guardians and right-thinking members of the public question the morality of the programme especially with regards to the explicit and uncensored scenes that portray sex, nudity, violence, alcoholism, and cheating.

The aim of this study therefore was to understand the perception of undergraduate students of Rivers State University on BBN and how their exposure to the reality programme could affect their dispositions.

Statement Of The Problem

Reality television programmes are increasingly gaining viewership and followership which is growing tremendously. Reality television programmes have gradually become the toast of television stations and

advertisers. The relatively cheap production costs and high viewership figures ensure a steady stream of new and repeated formats of reality programmes on television screens in different homes today.

Generally, reality programme are perceived as unscripted programmes that are focused on footage of real events/situations that are about to naturally unfold. Though reality programme like Big Brother Naija (BBN) are not dependent on writers and actors for delivery they are run by producers and editors. Because participants of Big Brother Naija(BBN) are not guarded by scripts and their actions are as spontaneous as they are unedited, audiences feel a close connection to the participants and share in their moods, reactions and feelings yet the television channel gets to decide what footages would be aired and how these footages are chosen. So, even if everything is real, the television channel broadcasts it selectively.

Big Brother Naija (BBN) despite its popularity and success has received a bunch of criticisms on claims that the live programme promotes immorality, has little or no moral value, celebrates idleness, is a waste of time, has strong adult themes that are offensive to viewers. Nigerian Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka, cited in Lengnan (2013), asserts that Big Brother Niaja (BBN) is not a part of the Nigerian culture. Some people may also be seeing reality programmes on television as another way of exploiting the minds of the young audiences of the programmes without morally impacting their lives. Right- thinking individuals like Soyinka insist that the show propagates an ideology that gives the youths the impression that idling away on national television for a given period of time could earn them fortune and fame that could set them up for life.

This study therefore seeks to analyse the perception of undergraduate students of Rivers State University on Big Brother Naija (BBN) reality programme, paying particular attention to the contents of the programme and how their attitude formation is influenced by the images of the programme.

Objectives of the Study

1. Ascertain whether Rivers State University students watch the Big Brother Naija reality
2. Find out Rivers State University students' expectations of a reality programme.
3. Ascertain the perception of Rivers State University students of Big Brother reality television programme.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Debating Reality Television

Since the early days of reality programming in America, there have been critics who have consistently and wholeheartedly attacked the genre for being voyeuristic, cheap, sensational television. Articles such as 'Danger: Reality TV can Rot Your Brain', 'Ragbag of Cheap Thrills' or 'TV's Theatre of Cruelty' are typical of the type of commentary that dominates discussion of reality programming. With series such as *When Animals Attack* advertised with the image of a snarling dog and the words 'Lassie He Ain't', reality programmes are targets for all that is thought to be wrong with commercial television. In a UK report for the Campaign for Quality Television in 2003, reality TV was singled out by Michael Tracey of the University of Colorado as the 'stuff of the vulgate', encouraging 'moral and intellectual impoverishment in contemporary life'. Robert Thompson of Syracuse University suggests that reality TV is popular 'because it's stupid and moronic'. Broadcaster Nick Clarke argues in his book *The Shadow of a Nation* that the popularity of reality TV has led to a dangerous blurring of boundaries between fact and fiction, and as a result reality TV has had a negative effect on modern society. Such criticism of reality TV fails to take into account the variety of formats within the reality genre. To say that all reality TV is stupid and

moronic is to ignore the development of the genre over the past decade.

Big Brother Naija and 'Morality'

There have been numerous debates about the 'morality' of the BBN show and whether or not the show should be permitted by the Nigeria Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) to allow its continued broadcast in Nigeria. Many right thinking individuals have spoken against the programme, questioning its motives, essence, benefits and importance in the society. Wole Soyinka in an interview categorically stated that Big Brother Naija is not a part of the Nigerian culture (Lengnan., 2013). The public emotional outbursts, skimpy dresses, bare chested men in the midst of the ladies, lust and open display of affections seem not to sit right with some people.

According to Amadi et. al. (2019) Collins Yakubu-Hammer of News Agency of Nigeria portrays the programmes as "full of intrigues characterized by hate, love, pretence, lies and strategies to excel". (p.65). At some point, Nigeria threatened to ban the show (Arah, 2017) from being aired in the country but a compromised was reached where the extreme lurid scenes like 'shower scenes' and 'sex scenes' were limited to late night broadcasts. Beyond that, certain scenes require additional subscription but there is still the problem of whom has access to what. The idea behind the choice of shooting the show in South Africa and denying Nigeria the economic benefits that could be accrued from the programme was also criticized.

Big Brother Naija and the Viewing Habits of the Audience.

Big Brother Naija is a reality television show that airs 24 hours of everyday. Staunch viewers of the programme find themselves completely drawn to television screens at every given moment. The period of the programme according to Adam (2014) compels viewers to spend more time than usual watching television. In watching this amount of television, viewers become participatory subjects of the show such that the time away from the television is often spent in discussions about the programme. Gortmaker (2001) admits that the viewing habits and time spent on BBN actively or passively affects other aspects of the audience' lives. He explains that the cognitive aspect of individuals become shaped by prolonged programme consumption which would in the long run affect other aspects of their lives. Adam (2014) reports that upon massive consumption of BBN, individuals are eager to be a part of every step of the lives of the housemates and do not want to miss out on any action. The audience also form a connection with certain housemates in the course of watching the programme that they begin to feel like a part of the programme. Everything that goes on in 'the house' becomes of immense importance to them. The illusionary effect of Big Brother Naija becomes a blurred line to them and this makes the viewer's susceptible to addiction of the program and possibly irrational thought processes.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The uses and gratifications theory was framed by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in the 1970s (DeFleur, & Ball-Rokeach., 1989). This theory is a functionalistic method of understanding media use. This theory postulates that media exists to fulfil individual needs and that the medium that people make use of at a particular time is dependent on their needs at the moment (Mehrad & Tajer., 2016). The theory "predicts that media-consumption gratifications are influenced by culture, social institutions, media opportunities, circumstances, personal traits, needs, beliefs, and values" (DeFleur et. Al., 1989: 13). Media consumption comes from one's immediate need and this need is backed up by the individual's belief that such a need could be met and gratified by using such media. The theory seeks to understand why people deliberately choose media and how the chosen media fulfil their needs for information, relaxation, entertainment, or socialization.

Empirical Review

Few studies exists in relation to Big Brother Naija reality television programme amongst these is a study carried out in Georgia in the United States of America by Gandy and McChristain (2005) entitled "Reality Television Goes Interactive: The Big Brother Television Audience", the researchers sought to find out and understand more about the viewing habits and internet use levels of a typical *Big Brother* viewer. The study also sought to gain insight into the types of audiences that reality programme like Big Brother tend to attract. Using the survey method, the researchers conducted telephone interviews.

This study and the aforesaid study are similar in the sense that they are both interested in the relationship between viewers of reality television shows and the viewing audience. The difference between the above study and the present one is that while Gandy et. al. (2005) studied the people of Georgia in America; this study shall focus on students of Rivers State University in Nigeria.

Nwafor and Ezike (2015) conducted a study on "Viewership of Big Brother Africa Reality TV programme and its Influence on the Moral Conduct of Undergraduate Students in Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria. The study sought to investigate the viewership of the audience and figure out the influence of the programme on the morals of undergraduate students of Ebonyi State University. The study adopted both the quantitative and qualitative methods of gathering data, using the survey design.

The relationship between the current study and the above study is that they are both on undergraduate students. The aforementioned study is dissimilar from the present one because unlike Nwafor et al. (2015) who conducted their study to find out the how Big Brother Africa influences the moral conduct of undergraduates of Ebonyi State University, this study seeks to discover the perception of undergraduate students of Rivers State University.

Methodology

Survey method was adopted to generate data for the study. This method is considered appropriate because it is capable of obtaining information from a large number of people, and offers the researchers an opportunity to conduct the study in a real life situation .Questionnaire was the main instrument of data generation. The population of this study was the total number of the Undergraduate Students of Rivers State University. According to the Director of Information and Technology Centre (ITC) of Rivers State University, the total number of undergraduate students from all the faculties of the university amount to 26,834. The sample size was determined using the Raosoft table. This is an online sample calculator. Therefore, at a confidence level of 95% and error level of 5%, a sample size for a population of 26,834 is 400. The sample size for this study therefore was 400 undergraduate students of Rivers State University.

The major instrument employed for this study is questionnaire, containing both open-ended and close-ended questions. It was prepared by the researchers, validated by three experts, presented and found reliable. Based on the objective of the research 400 copies of the questionnaire were administered using convenience sampling technique on the respondents. Though 400 copies were distributed only 398 was retrieved, 373 returned valid for used. Data collected was analyzed using the frequency distribution tables, percentage and weighted mean score (WMS).

Data Presentation

Table 1: Questionnaire Distribution and Rate of Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentages
Distributed questionnaire	400	100%
Retrieved questionnaire	389	97.30%
Usable Copies	373	93.30%

The table above provides a numeric analysis of the distribution, retrieval and validity rates of the distribution of the questionnaire. Of the 400 copies that were distributed, only 373 returned valid for use.

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentages
15 – 18	218	58.40%
19 - 25	93	24.90%
26 – 30	62	16.60%
30 and above	0	0.00%
Total	373	100%

The above table reveals the age bracket of respondents. From the table we can deduce that a majority of respondents (54.9%) are teenagers who fall within the ages of 15 and 18 years.

Table 3, Research Question 1: Do Rivers State University students watch the Big Brother Naija reality show

Category	Frequency	Percentages
1 - 2hrs	188	50.40%
3 - 4hrs	99	26.50%
5hrs and above	86	23.10%
All night long	0	0.00%
Total	373	100%

Data gotten from the research question one as presented in the table 3 above, show that on a daily basis, majority of respondents (50.4%) watch the programme for at least one to two hours. No respondent watches the BBN all night long.

Table 4, Research Question 2: What are Rivers State University students' expectations of a reality programme

Curiousity/Surprises	Fashion	Games and Brain Teasers	Controversies and Conflicts	Reality	Total
10	79	68	27	42	373

The table above describes a theme of responses of the expectations that respondents have of the Big Brother reality television programme. The result shows that the majority of respondents (147) expected to have a lot of fun and be entertained throughout the duration of the programme. A minority of respondents (10) watched the programme because they were curious as to what would happen in the course of the show.

Table 5, Research Question 3: How do Rivers State University students perceive Big Brother reality television show

Category	Frequency	WMS	Decision
Strongly Agree	90		
Agree	215		
Disagree	61		
Strongly Disagree	7		
Total	373	3.0	Agreed

The table above is a presentation of data on the perception of River State University Student on Big Brother Naija Reality Television programme. The result revealed that Majority of respondents (50.9%) do not think that Big Brother reality television programme is morally upright and at a Weighted Mean Score of 3.0, this result portrays agreement.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.

Research Question 1: Do Rivers State University students watch the Big Brother Naija reality show?

Findings for Research question one showed that Rivers State University students know a lot about the Big Brother Naija reality television programme which is as a result of the fact that they watch the show. This finding is in corroboration with Steele and Brown (1995) who posits that watching reality programmes like Big Brother Naija is a regular habit that the young minds form.

Research Question 2: What are Rivers State University students' expectations of a reality programme?

Findings for Research Question two show that Respondents expect to be entertained, informed and educated. Others watched out of curiosity, learn the latest fashion trends and enjoy the conflicts and quarrels that could arise in the course of the show. They however do not see the point of having sexually explicit scenes in the programme. This finding supports the assertion of Wilfred, Grace and Joy (2005)

that viewers of the show get to expand their horizons on the issues that individuals may be facing in the society.

Research Question 3: How do Rivers State University students perceive Big Brother reality television show?

Findings for Research Question three show that Majority of respondents (50.9%) do not think that Big Brother reality television programme is morally upright. This finding is in tandem with Coyne *et al*., (2010) that aggression in reality television may have an enhanced effect on viewers' attitudes and behaviours (p.285). This means that the fighting, bickering and conflicts that are shown on the Big Brother reality television programme are morally questionable and indecent.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that students form different perceptions when they watch the Big Brother television programme because of individual difference but for the most part, they find the show relatively entertaining and informative. More importantly, students feel connected to the programme because it appeals to their individual interests.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are postulated:

- Producers of the show should take into consideration that the audience of the programme include the younger generation and pay attention to the level of adult themes that are permitted in the programme's rules and regulations.
- There should be more educative yet entertaining items in the itinerary of the participants of the show.
- The Big Brother reality television show should endeavor to make it its goal to morally uplift viewers of the programme.

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